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AUTHOR Hample, Dale
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ABSTRACT

The fact that little research has been conducted on the penalties for violating communication rules precipitated this study exploring the consequences of a superior lying to a subordinate and of a subordinate lying to a superior. The subjects were 82 college students who filled out attribution scales regarding the superior and subordinate depicted in a script. The scripts were manipulated so that the subordinate lied to the superior in half the situations and the superior lied to the subordinate in the other half. The results showed that either type of lie (by subordinate or superior) was found to reduce a subject's trust in, and solidarity with the liar. As predicted, the penalties for lying were more pronounced when the superior lied: that is, the deceptive boss was judged more severely than was the deceptive subordinate. Who lied seemed to make less difference in assessments of the victim, however. A positive relation between trust and solidarity was found, though this correlation was slightly lower than the one found in a previous study. (RL)

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SOME EFFECTS OF AN INTENTIONAL COMMUNICATION RULE VIOLATION: THE CASE OF SUPERIOR-TO-SUBORDINATE LIES

By

Dale Hample

Western Illinois University

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ABSTRACT

Little research attention is ordinarily paid to the penalties for violating communication rules. This study explores the consequences of a superior lying to a subordinate, and compares them to the case of a subordinate lying to a superior. Either type of lie is found to reduce trust in, and solidarity with, the liar. The penalties are more pronounced when the superior lies, as predicted. A positive relation between trust and solidarity is replicated, and Wheeless' scales for both variables are revalidated.

SOME EFFECTS OF AN INTENTIONAL COMMUNICATION RULE VIOLATION:

THE CASE OF SUPERIOR-TO-SUBORDINATE LIES

The last decade has witnessed an increasing use of rules as paradigmatic descriptors of communication between humans. Rules are typically distinguished from the classical laws of physical science on the grounds that laws are inviolable relations (ordinarily causal), while rules derive from non-physical authority and so may be violated. Hence, gravity is a law, while civility is a rule.

Our literature's most detailed account of rules' structure is the system propounded by Cronen, Pearce and Harris (1979). An example of their system is a regulative rule concerning formal dining. They express the rule (absent their special symbols) as follows (p.28):

In a formal dining episode,

(1)	If you are at the table,	Then you are prohibited from slobbering soup,	So that you will avoid being construed as unintelligent, rude, and low class.

Most of our attention has been centered on the earlier components of such rules: defining episodes, identifying regularities which might be evidence for the observance of rules, trying to match episodes and regularities. In general, we have been trying to unearth and explicate specific rules. When consideration is given to rule violation (a possibility treated only rarely in our literature), the point of the analysis is how to repair the deviance without sacrificing the interaction (see Pearce, 1976; Boynton, 1979). The deviant is most conveniently viewed as someone unacquainted with the appropriate rules (as a foreigner might be), or unable to execute the expected behavior (as a child might be), but who is

good will may be relied upon. The problem is how to manage the coordinated creation of meaning in spite of the deviance.

The circumstances envisioned in this paper are quite different. Here, the rule is violated intentionally by a person capable of respecting it. But the purpose of the violation is not to endanger the interaction, as in the case of being rude to a bore. In fact, the motive for the deviance might well be seen as the preservation of the episode (though its construal will differ significantly depending on whose perspective is taken). In contrast to previous work, this research deals with the unilateral management of meaning.[1] "Lying is the expression of one person's liberty to warp communication between two people" (Eck, 1970, p.39).

As the rule in question is quite a general one, it may be expressed like this (with a more specific version to follow in the next section):

In nearly all communication episodes,

(2)	If you are expected to provide information about yourself or the world,	Then you are prohibited from intentionally saying false or irrelevant things,	So that you will avoid being construed unfavorably.

Previous attention to this rule has centered on the ways in which the prohibtion might be violated (Ehninger, 1977; Bowers, Elliott & Desmond, 1977) or some of the motives which might impel its violation (Hample, 1979).

The last component of the rule--the penalty for violation--is of particular interest in this investigation. The penalty is stated vaguely in rule 2 because it would seem to be a genuinely broad phenomenon: an unfavorable evaluation might deservedly involve verdicts on personality, ability and/or behaviors. One purpose of this study is to sharpen our empirical evidence regarding the

specific nature of this deviance penalty.

SUPERIOR-SUBORDINATE LIES

Though we are all aware of the general social norm making deception a deviant behavior, we have little trouble recognizing that some lies are worse than others, and that a few may even be beneficial (Knapp & Comadena, 1979; Wolk & Henley, 1970). It is, therefore, worthwhile to explain why lies are generally proscribed, and precisely what lies are under study here.[2]

Much of our work on interpersonal communication is aimed at explaining the status of some type of positive, approved relationship between two or more people--friendship, affiliation or liking, for instance. Wheeless (1976; 1978) has made a useful contribution in introducing the concept of solidarity, which may serve as a summary (or possibly as a closely related determinant) of these positive dependent variables.

Solidarity is importantly influenced by both trust and self-disclosure.[3] What Pearce (1974) labels a cognitive state of trust may occur only when one person has confidence that another will not needlessly hurt him/her. Trust, in turn, is an essential prerequisite to reciprocal self-disclosure (Jourard, 1971, ch. 15; Mortensen, 1972, pp. 264-265; Altman & Taylor, 1973, ch. 3). Rosenfeld (1979) reports, for instance, that common reasons for avoiding self-disclosure are to maintain control over the relationship or one's self-image; full trust in the other, of course, would obviate such threats. And since trust of other implies or follows from predictability of other's behavior (Pearce, 1974), Berger and Calabrese (1975) would predict that greater trust should lead both to more intimacy (axiom 4) and more liking (axiom 7), and, therefore, to more communication (theorems 2 & 5). These expectations are summarily supported in Wheeless' studies: he finds that trust and self-disclosure are positively related (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977; Wheeless, 1978); that more self-disclosure occurs in relations

characterized by more solidarity (Wheeless, 1976; 1978); and that greater trust predicts more solidarity (Wheeless, 1978). In sum, trust, disclosure and solidarity are all positively and strongly related, on both empirical and theoretical grounds.

In general, detected lies ought to be seen as trust violations. Lies are intentional falsehoods which deviate from the reciprocal expectations of truth and relevance which ordinarily serve as rules for human discourse (Ehninger, 1977). In research useful by generalization, Leathers (1979) reports that unreliable messages (in his case, inconsistency between verbal and nonverbal channels) initially cause confusion, and finally, displeasure and withdrawal on the part of receivers. Detected lies, then, ought to reduce trust, increase general uncertainty, make honest responsive self-disclosure less likely and harm interpersonal solidarity. This global hypothesis ought to be true in most cases, as rule 2 describes.

The prediction can be sharpened somewhat by moving it into a more specific communication context--that of superior-subordinate work relations. Hample (1979) reports evidence that lies are often used to equalize imbalanced interpersonal relationships. By extension, then, lies are expected to be weapons of the less powerful, not those who control resources. This reasoning leads to the expectation that lies are seen as worse when told by a superior to a subordinate, as opposed to being told by a subordinate to a superior. Maier and Lavrakas (1976), in fact, report that superiors' lies are "more reprehensible" than those told by subordinate. The rule under investigation, then, is

In superior-subordinate work interactions,

(3)	If you are the superior,	Then you are prohibited from lying,	So that you will avoid sacrificing trust and solidarity.

A similar rule should hold for subordinates, but the penalties are predicted to be less severe.

HYPOTHESES

Trust and solidarity are used here as dependent variables (see the statement of rule 3), while the source of a detected lie (superior or subordinate) is manipulated. The selection of these variables is implicitly justified in the preceeding section. The reasoning and review of literature just concluded generate these predictions:

(1) A detected lie from either source reduces both trust in, and solidarity with, the liar.

(2) Trust is positively associated with solidarity.

(3) Trust and solidarity will be more negatively affected by a superior's lie than by a subordinate's.

Hypothesis 1 seeks to confirm the operation of the anti-lie norm in superior-subordinate communication episodes, as expressed in rule 3; hypothesis 2 reflects this study's opportunity to replicate Wheeless' (1978) finding; and hypothesis 3 tests the theory that lies are more acceptable when they tend to equalize power relations.

METHOD

Respondents were 82 undergraduates, 41% male and 59% female, enrolled in a university-required public speaking course at the author's institution.[4] Data were collected on the first day of class in various sections of the course.

Students were given booklets, which described the study as asking for impressions of the two participants in a conversation. The conversation was set in a work scene, and took place between a subordinate and his immediate superior. One of them asks if the other has finished the first's personnel evaluation, and after some hesitation is answered negatively. The introduction to the conversation makes clear, however, that the evaluation is complete, has been turned in, and is extremely unfavorable. In the debriefing, nearly all students reported noticing

that the evaluator had lied (subjects were not sensitized to the fact that the study actually concerned or contained deception). In half the booklets, the boss lies to the subordinate. In the other half, the subordinate lies to his boss about having finished the personnel recommendation. This is the source-of-lie manipulation, and was done randomly.

After reading the conversation, subjects filled out scales regarding the superior and the subordinate. Wheeless' (1978) twenty-item solidarity scales were applied to each principal. These seven-point Likert scales ask respondents to agree or disagree with items like "We are very close to each other." Students were asked to assume that they were co-workers in order to make the ratings. Following the solidarity scales, subjects filled out the Wheeless and Grotz (1977) Individualized Trust Scales from their own points of view. This fifteen-item scale consists of seven-step semantic differential pairs like "trustworthy-untrustworthy."[5]

Subjects were then debriefed. The study required about twenty minutes for everyone to finish.

RESULTS

Scales

Before investigating any hypotheses, the validity and reliability of the scales were assessed. In general, the results are not quite as clear-cut as in the reports originally validating the measures, but this may well be due to the smaller sample size here (82, versus 385 in the solidarity study and 249 in the trust study).

Factor analysis of the solidarity scales led to a one factor solution accounting for only 30% of the variance in the scales (about half that reported in Wheeless, 1978). A second factor would have added about 12%, while a five or six factor solution would be required to explain 60% to 70% of the scale variance.

The two-factor solution was given serious consideration, but after submitting scales to varimax rotation, no scale with a loading of .5 or higher for the liar's data also had a loading that high for the victim, and vice versa. This was interpreted as evidence of instability in the data, and the decision was made to use Wheeless' one factor solution.

Reliabilities (standardized item alpha) were then calculated for the five items with highest loadings, the thirteen best items and all twenty. The five-item scale yielded a reliability of .79 for the victim and .78 for the liar. The thirteen-item scale gave .86 and .85, and all twenty items produced .87 and .86. The twenty-item scale is therefore used here, both because of its higher reliability and the advantage of direct comparison with other research.

Factor analysis of the trust scales revealed one dominant factor, accounting for 44% of the variance in scales for the victim, and 49% for the liar. This factor accounted for 59% of the total variance in Wheeless and Grotz (1977). Reliability of the nine best items was .89 for the victim's scores and .92 for the liar's. For all fifteen items, these figures are .90 and .92. The full fifteen-item scale is therefore used here, largely to promote comparability with other research.

In sum, data analysis allows use of the original solidarity and trust scales.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis predicts that a detected lie reduces both trust in, and solidarity with, the liar. Table 1 compares scores on both dependent variables for the liar and his victim. As the correlated t-tests indicate, substantial differences appear between judgment of trust and solidarity for the two principals. The "regardless of source" line in the table is the hypothesis' most direct support. Interestingly, in view of hypothesis 3, the effect is much more marked when the

superior lies. Hypothesis 1 is supported unambiguously.

INSERT TABLES 1 & 2 ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis 2 predicts that trust and solidarity will be positively related. The correlations of table 2 indicate that this is so. The Pearson r's of about .5 are lower than, but comparable to, Wheeless' (1979) reported .65, using the same scales.

Inspection of the correlations in the lower half of table 2 yields some insight into the way trust and solidarity judgments are formed. When the scores of liar and victim are correlated, the table shows a significant negative relation, especially for trust. This points to a contrast effect: as evaluation of one principal rises, judgment of the other drops. If judgments were made independently, correlations would be near zero. If subjects were affected by a serious response bias, correlations would be positive. The negative correlations, therefore, suggest strongly that judgments are comparative when the principals are interacting. The coefficients in the bottom half of table 2 are sufficient to indicate the operation of a contrast effect, but they are small enough to leave plenty of room for independent judgments as well: 75% to 90% of the total judgment variance remains unexplained by the contrast effect, even when results are statistically significant.

Hypothesis 3 predicts that the penalties for lying will be more severe when the liar is a superior than when a subordinate. Table 3 reports the pertinent results. For both trust and solidarity, the deceptive boss was more severely

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INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

---

judged than the deceptive subordinate. Who lied seems to make less difference in assessments of the victim, however. The solidarity comparison did not reveal a significant difference in evaluation of boss and subordinate victims (power=.69 for a medium effect size at alpha=.05; Cohen, 1969), though the trust results are nearly significant (p=.07, power=.68; Cohen, 1969). Hypothesis 3 is supported.

DISCUSSION

The study's results indicate that rule 3 holds for both superiors and subordinates, although the penalties are significantly harsher for superiors lying to subordinates. Presumably, the rule is enforced by a variety of evaluative judgments (e.g., reprehensibility in Maier & Lavrakas, 1976). The present investigation indicates that deception penalties extend into an important network of interpersonal variables: trust and solidarity are closely connected to self-disclosure, intimacy, liking, self-image and frequency of interaction.

The pervasiveness of the penalty is, of course, due to the fact that these variables are already related to one another. This study offers no evidence that lying has independent effects of each of these measures. This has several implications for future penalties research.

The choice of a dependent measure is problematic. Any of the linked variables mentioned would probably have produced results supporting the hypotheses. This will likely be true in most investigations of interpersonal communication rules because most can be expected to have affective penalties. One might, of course, simply use liking as an operationalization of penalty, this translation will normally be so broad as to be uninteresting and/or unpersuasive theoretically. The solution to the dilemna of general or arbitrary criteria is to find a specific variable which can both be justified by the theoretical nature of the rule and be linked to a more general evaluative network. In the present study, this was fairly simple to do--detected deception is almost synonymous

with loss of trust, which has known relations to other variables--but other projects may encounter more difficulty in satisfying such a standard. What, for example, is the unique penalty to be associated with incompetent turn-taking? Researchers faced with such problems may have to fall back on a family of linked affect variables to be used as dependent measures. It may be possible to standardize such practice, and so allow comparisons of penalty severity for different rules.

Penalties research, though it has an undeniably cynical taint, may be absolutely essential in arriving at a proper understanding of some types of interpersonal communication. Lies, for instance, are difficult to define unambiguously:

> In some cases, the pseudo-agreement and false praise of ingratiation is considered an act of deception; at other times it is discounted as an expectation of the situation or ignored because it didn't significantly alter the recipient's perceptions. . . . Euphemisms and exaggerations may add an extension to information presented, but they only become lies in the context of specific persons in specific situations. . . . There is an entire class of message behavior which essentially involves the simultaneous presentation of two messages which communicate two different meanings. . . . Sometimes this condition is the result of attempts to consciously deceive another and sometimes it isn't. (Knapp & Comadena, 1979, p. 272)

This passage indicates the lack of typology or clear definition of a lie, but is not helpful in resolving the need. Our inability to produce an unambiguous constitutive identification of the animal, however, does not obscure its reliable spoor: whenever a (real) lie is detected, penalties will be invoked. Use of this criterion may eventually make it possible to generate an empirically-grounded

classification of deceptive communication which will let us add detail to the proviso "they only become lies in the context of specific persons in specific situations." Investigations of other rules might also benefit from a strategy of penalties research.

NOTES

[1]Knapp and Comadena (1979) point out that deception draws on the motives and needs of the victim, and so lying is in that sense an interactive process. However, I think that the idea of unilateral action better captures the manipulative flavor of the lies under consideration here.

[2]A typology might eventually prove useful, but it would have to be organized on lines (such as severity of consequences, benefit/harm ratio, nature of relationship, context, etc.) for which we presently have no empirical data. As a result, researched lies ought to be carefully described so that they might later be fit into convenient classes.

[3]I have no direct evidence for making solidarity the causal and temporal end point of this relationship. In fact, each of these three variables probably exerts some reciprocal influence on both of the others. Nonetheless, it makes theoretical sense to make solidarity the dependent variable, and I will do so. My hypotheses and conclusions follow from any of the possible time orderings, however.

[4]Tables do not show 82 subjects because of missing data. Use of computer-readable sheets to collect responses resulted in occasional omissions or unclarities. Since the scales used here each consist of fifteen or twenty items, leaving out only one of forty answers could cause a subject to fall out of an analysis. All students were used in at least one of the analyses.

[5]To increase clarity, I reworded the second item, changing it from "trustful of this person-distrustful of this person" to "I am trustful of this person-I am distrustful of this person."

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TABLE 1

Effects of Lying on Trust and Solidarity Means

	TRUST			SOLIDARITY		
	Liar	Victim	t(N)	Liar	Victim	t(N)
Regardless of Source	55.97	33.12	6.90*** (67)	44.47	60.68	5.72*** (72)
Boss Lies	60.64	29.85	6.82*** (33)	40.08	61.28	5.67*** (36)
Subordinate Lies	51.44	36.29	3.35** (34)	48.54	60.43	2.83** (35)

Note. For trust, a high mean indicates low trust.

**$p < .01$

***$p < .001$

TABLE 2

Relationship Between Trust and Solidarity

	TRUST V. SOLIDARITY, r(N)	
	Liar	Victim
Regardless of Source	.51*** (70)	.53*** (68)
Boss Lies	.60*** (36)	.54*** (31)
Subordinate Lies	.35* (34)	.54*** (36)

	LIAR V. VICTIM, r(N)	
	Trust	Solidarity
Regardless of Source	-.41*** (67)	-.21* (72)
Boss Lies	-.50** (33)	-.14 (36)
Subordinate Lies	-.27+ (34)	-.27+ (35)

Note. Signs of the correlation coefficients in the top half of the table have been reversed to indicate results if trust and solidarity scaled in the same direction. See note to table 1.

+$p < .10$

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

***$p < .001$

TABLE 3

Effect of Lie's Source on Trust and Solidarity Means

	SOLIDARITY			TRUST		
	Boss Lies (N)	Subordinate Lies (N)	t	Boss Lies (N)	Subordinate Lies (N)	t
Liar	40.35 (40)	49.46 (37)	2.73**	60.24 (37)	49.92 (37)	2.58*
Victim	61.49 (37)	60.76 (37)	.20	29.49 (35)	36.03 (37)	1.83+

Note. For trust, a high mean indicates low trust.

+$p < .10$

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$